

Etching Up From the Breadline

By CLEMENT WOOD.

IN 1893—the panic year—a young artist, twenty years old, shivered his way one night through the winter-whipped streets of Manhattan. Ahead of him he saw a dark blur on the white emptiness of an avenue. As he came closer he recognized it—the frozen tail of the old Fleischman headline. He reached

a job. . . . And keep on drawing . . . Cowboys, bronchos, Indians—a Paradise for an artist searching for the color in life, to perpetuate in man's artistic mediums. . . . In San Antonio he stayed.

In 1922 the same artist, thirty years

and the arts. One year later he moved to Houston, purchased a Prince Albert and won a wife. She was a charming art student, who took the frock coated, sober young man as a preacher at first. When she learned that he was an artist she could not let the artistic genius and the frock coat go by; so she took him as a husband. The aspiring couple started housekeeping with the first installment paid on the dining room set, a large deficit at the bank and a billion dollars in optimism.

The same household, thirty years older, is now staked out midway of Broadway. The studio is one of the most charming rooms in New York city, built around an old refectory table, early Jacobean, from some vanished monastery. An exquisite carved Italian walnut chest lifts its venerable height to the high ceiling; it is flanked by two splendid Dutch panels, early seventeenth century. There are bronzes on all sides—dull flowers of medieval Russia, including one of the finest bronze samovars ever seen outside of a museum. The room is thronged, afternoons and evenings, with leading poets, bankers, actors, art connoisseurs, a visiting diplomat, a doctor whose name spans the sea, a titled Englishman, a sculptor. . . . There is open house to the arts, as well as to human beings, at the Walls.

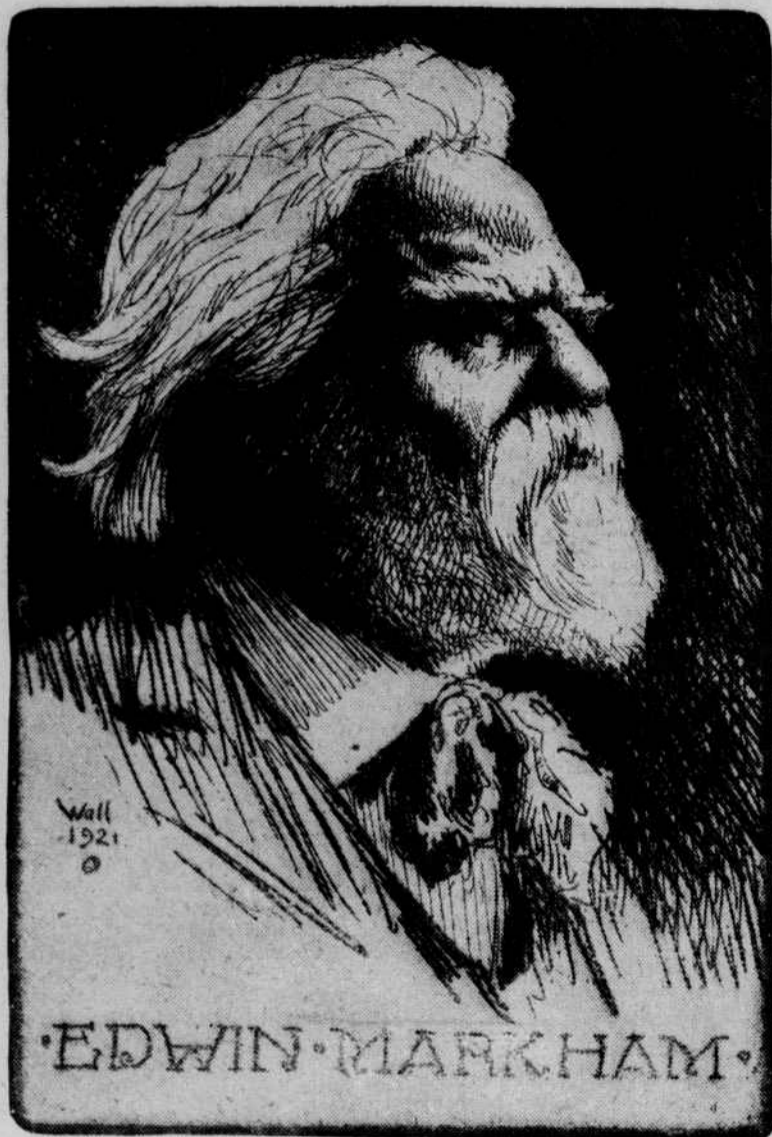
The year 1898 brought the Spanish-American war. Bernhardt Wall, who cannot resist being first in everything, was the first man to enlist in the 202d New York, and did his tropical bit in Cuba, sketching all the time. At the war's end he came back to the States and worked around in minor art fields, conquering each one. At first it was posters. For the next few years he was called "the postcard king"; he has, perhaps, made more designs for postcards than any liv-

ing man, having more than 5,000 to his credit. But he was not satisfied. He had never forgotten a printing press he made for himself as a boy. Even the most artistic postcards were ephemeral—to-day the rage, forgotten to-morrow. Just eight years ago he took up the charmingly snobbish art of etching. For six years he worked, mastering its astringent technic. Two years ago he saw the way, and took it; and these two years have meant the unique flowering of his genius as artist and publisher.

The Modern Monk.

First came the dog book—"Man's Best Friend"—published in 1920. Within a year Wall's *Etched Monthly* had made its curtsy to art lovers; this was an absolute innovation. The mechanical labor was more than any one man could sustain; a second year saw this compressed and deepened into Wall's *Etched Quarterly*, its present form. Recently he has etched, for private circulation only, a splendid poem by one of the outstanding poets of the country; she is very proud of being the first human being to have a book privately etched for her. Not only have these volumes and periodicals found niches in every section of the country, but subscriptions and inquiries come in from England, the Continent, and even further lands. Bernhardt Wall himself sketches, etches, prints and binds the books; he does everything but make the ink and the paper. His apparent aim is to give America the seven years' itch.

His own theories of the art are striking and delightful. His twinkling eyes narrow, fasten to your face and look through you to get unrealized visions of artistic beauty. "I think," he will say, "I think often of the old monks . . . their books, their missals, done entirely by hand. Autographic. . . . My own work is hand work, every bit of it. . . ."



Edwin Markham, from an etching of Bernhardt Wall.

it and sauntered broodingly along its murky length. He clutched his sketch-book more closely against his breast and wondered how many nights it would be before he was one among the hungry many.

Halfway up the breadline he felt his arm clutched. "Bernhardt Wall!"

"Why, Ed! What in the world—"

Above the shabby overcoat, the month's stubble on the cheeks of the young man who had spoken first expanded into a grin. "Broke. Hoboed over from Chicago. Gosh, it's chilly! What you doing?"

"Me? Oh, sketching. . . . Trying to sell my drawings."

"Say, Wall, remember those old days in Buffalo—the quartet and all? I thought you would. . . . Making any real money?"

"I sold some children's stuff. But that money's gone. . . ."

"You know, New York's too cold for a white man. Let's beat it down to Baltimore!"

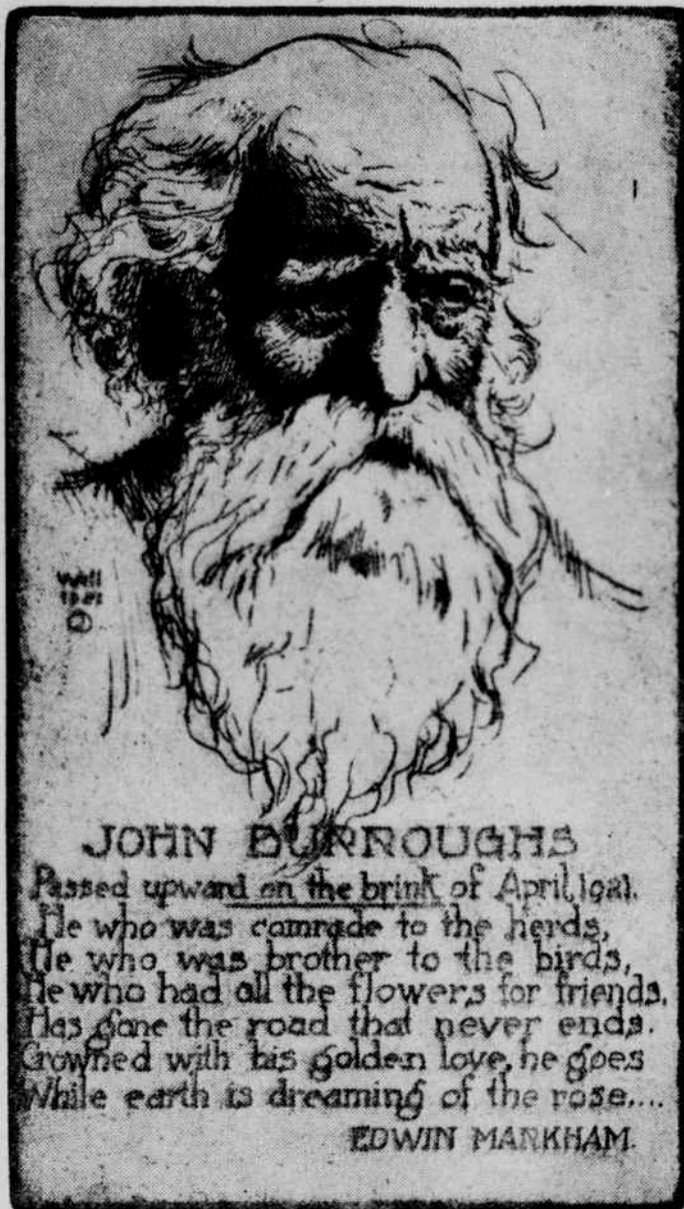
Objections were soon overcome. The two young friends found the freight yard and started the journey. Philadelphia . . . Baltimore. . . . There seemed no reason to stop yet. The easy-going South and the long westward swing along the gulf. . . . Somewhere in Louisiana the man who had been in the breadline dropped off; to-day he is a distinguished lawyer, practicing in Buffalo. The young artist kept on until at last Texas was reached. . . . San Antonio! All the way down his sketching had continued. He dropped off at the little town, stretched his train cramped muscles and decided to look around a bit. Maybe he could find

older, is recognized as one of the great contributors to the art of etching. In the history of that exquisite form of expression, that patrician medium, he is written down as the first man to publish an all-etched book; as the first man to publish an etched quarterly; as the first man to publish an etched monthly. His etchings and first states hang in the collections of J. P. Morgan, of Henry Clay Frick, of Henry E. Huntington, of Frederick W. Vanderbilt; they share, with brewing company calendars and clippings from the rotogravure sections, the dusty walls of Tony Maschelli, the corner bootblack; Pat McCarty, the corner policeman; Mrs. Helen Yarmolinski, the neighborhood cleaning woman. They are on display in the Newark Public Library, the Grosvenor Library at Buffalo, the Toronto Museum of Art, and also in the district Tammany Club, and the nearest branch of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.

These thirty years have been thirty years of work. Edison may regularly sleep his four hours a day; there are days, even now, when Bernhardt Wall does not get that much. His recipe for success is simple: Work, grin, get there!

San Antonio.

At the end of the first year in San Antonio the artist was on the up grade. He had built up a clientele of elementary art pupils; he had organized and become the first president of the San Antonio Art League, whose exhibition started Texas; he had become part owner of the San Antonio Engraving Company. In less than another year he was art editor of the *Gulf Messenger*, a journal of literature



John Burroughs, from an etching by Bernhardt Wall.